XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
WA6-2034;TR4-4246

20734

October 18, 1966

Mr. Clayton Fritchey
NEWSDAY
National Press Bldg.
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Fritchey,

One expects a child to learn, once it has picked up a hot coal, not to do it again. How long will it be before the press shows the common sense of a child. I am referring to your column in the Washington Star for the 14th. The press, by its uncritical attitude, by the abdication of its function in our society that it me are near sacred, made possible the whitewashing of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Perhaps without so indending, you are slapping the stuff back on as soon as it begins to peel.

Perhaps you will recall that I made a half-dozen trips to your office in May before I found you in. I then gave you a copy of my book WHITEWASH: THE REPORT ON THE WARREN REPORT, offered to answer any questions you might have and promised to show you the source of everything in it if you so requested. At that time I warned you that forthcoming books had a subtle doctrine that you would not agree with, that they assault the integrity of the members of the Commission. While mine work is the strongest criticism of the Report, it is the one that does not assault the members' integrity and seeks to show how they could have lent their names to such a palpably false document.

"The critics are now demanding a new inquiry 'by some completely unprejudiced and fearless body'", you say. I cannot claim to remember the words of the other books in such intimate detail, but I think they make no such demand. I believe I am alone in specifically concluding that the job expected of the Commission has not been done and

must be, entirely in public and preferably by Congress. Are you, in contradiction, saying that an American President can be killed and we may be satisfied as long as there remains a question within the capability of man to answer that is unanswered?

I presume you ignored my book and your piece came off the top of your head. We live in a society that makes such demands upon its writers that they often cannot face their typewriters with the responsibility of which they might be capable. But when they address themselves to the institution of the presidency, they owe it to our society, all of whose institutions are automatically involved, to find the time to know what they write about or to remain silent.

Instead you find your own straw men and use those of others. For example, you ask where "could a more trustworthy group of men be found", as though this is the question. The real question is where could a busier group of men be found. It is not that the members of the Commission were a bunch of crooks at all, for they are not; but were they able to perform their functions? This is the first question I address in WHITEWASH. These Commissioners were hand-fed by their staff. The record is clear that they were underinformed and misinformed- boxed in. You have chosen to ignore that record and to pontificate instead.

What nonsense you hold down and without complaint when you take Specter's "not a scintilla of new evidence" line and season it with Dulles's sophistry about finding "another" assassin. The Commission's best evidence is that there could not have been a single assassin and that Oswald was not one. Why now be concerned with "new evidence", welcome as that would be, when we have the abundance denied us in the Report and documented in my book? Why not examine what Specter did with that evidence he presented to the Commission, what he did and did not do in his function as assistant counsel, and especially with those "distinguished" doctors of the autopsy. Read my chapter "The Doctors and the Autopsy", which like 100% of the book comes 100% from the official evidence and see how much new evidence you require to have the gravest doubts. Are you satisfied that the first draft of the autopsy (my page 192) was burned and Mr. Specter was so unconcerned he accepted it as normal, like breathing, and handled it so haphazardly that all the other critics take the doctor's written certification

that what was burned was really the notes. What good reason can there be ~~that~~ for the irrevocable destruction of papers of such legal and historic importance, especially when the oldest existing draft of the autopsy is substantively different than the official copy on the basic fact of the autopsy and indeed strongly suggests both perjury and the subornation of perjury? Mr. Specter was without question. He asked nothing about the burning of the first draft and nothing save one misleading question about the changes in the second draft. This is what the members of the Commission got from the staff, plus such unhelpful bits as the assurance that the staff had proof that the so-called "found" bullet came from the stretcher of Governor Connally when it had no such proof and the man who found it refused to say this, instead saying he'd not be able to sleep if he did so ~~state~~. testify

You also swallow his placebo that the improperly suppressed autopsy photographs and Xrays are "merely corroborative" of the testimony of the doctors. Who knows this when they have not been seen? How can you ignore the possibility that they are <u>not</u> corroborative when the doctors' own testimony is in contradiction to itself on the basic elements? Is there any good reason why this evidence, what the lawyers call "best evidence", is not in the record as evidence and then, if there be good reason, kept in secret but as part of the evidence? Is there any reason the medical experts, who supposedly took the President's body apart as their awful task required, should not have had this "best evidence" as the basis of their testimony, not artists' representations of dubious antecedents?

You talks about Specter's nonsense as though it were good sense. But your lack of knowledge denies you the understanding that in that major part of the Report for which Specter was responsible, he substituted a hypothesis for fact. The Report says the doctors said that single "found" bullet could have inflicted seven non-fatal injuries on both men, smashing bones in the Governor's chest and wrist and lodging a fragment in his thigh while remaining virtually intact and unmutilated ( and ignoring the lack of deformity) whereas the doctors to a man swore this could not have happened. [illegible] in my book. If I do not have enough citations to this testimony for you, let

me know and I'll give you more, for on this essential point there is such an abundance, 100% against Mr. Specter, that I had not the space for all of it.

There is no limit to the probative evidence that is contrary to the conclusions or the ~~xxx~~ conclusions that derive from the poorest evidence alone or, unfortunately, from no evidence or ~~xxxx~~ worse, are in contradiction to all of the evidence of whatever character. This, admittedly, it is hard to believe. But I offer to show it to you, as my book leads you directly to it where I found it.

On the question of the integrity of the members, are you prepared to believe that Jerry Ford took out his sharp little scissors and snipped off half of one of the most important pieces of evidence, a photograph, perhaps the most seen photograph in the case. Look on my pages 202-3. Do you think itx likely that Senator Russell brought in his home movie outfit and spliced out those frames of the Zapruder movie that he didn't like? Look on my page 206. And what an amateur job of splicing this is! Why should the intact movie have been doctored at all. This is a photograph of page 19 of Volume 18 of the record. Look at it yourself. Missing are Frames 208-11, inclusive, with the alterations of 207 and 212 obvious. Yet it is Frame 210, according to the Report, where the President was accessible to the assassin allegedly in that sixth-floor snipers' nest for the first time. This frame does not exist in the official evidence. There is only a deformed and indistinct copy of it. Do you need "new evidence" to know that this should not have happened.

On page 208 of WHITEWASH you will findthis bullet of the wondrous powers as it is photographed in the evidence. There is not a visible blemish, and the testimony of those experts examining it is that there was none. Even in the reproduction of the reproduction, the scorings of the rifling are unblemished. Yet the FBI firearms expert, without contradiction from any source, testified that if this bullet had hit not numerous bones and lost numerous fragments but had just struck coarse cloth or leather it would thereby have been marked. He testified that this bullet had been wiped before it reached him, but that it still had foreign matter on it. He did not make any examination to determine the nature of the foreign matter (was it bone or blood?) and the Commission

and particularly its counsel on whom the responsibility for the real work fell asked no questions about the reported wiping off of the evidence or the failure of the FBI to seek to learn what evidence remained and never directed that at even a late date such an examination be undertaken.

All the "new evidence" you, Specter and Dulles may want is in the 26 volumes and not in the Report. There is more in addition that will be forthcoming.

If ours is to be the kind of society we want it to be, the kind of country it has been, then this entire mess must be washed out cleanly. Here no one bears greater responsibility than the press, not only because this is its function but because in this particular case it made the entire mess possible. Had it not defaulted during the investigation and upon issuance of the Report, the present nasty situation would not exist. You cannot evade your personal responsibility by blindly ignoring truth and defaming reason.

The damage your column has done is great. I do hope you will have the desire to rectify it, for this addresses itself to the fundamental integrity of our society.

If I can in any way help, please ask me to. I did not make this offer to you to begin with without intending to keep my promise.

Sincerely yours,

Harold Weisberg